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REF: Almaty 3296

SUBJECT: KAZAKH DELEGATION IS ALL BUSINESS IN EXAMINING PRT
OPTIONS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. A high-level Kazakhstani delegation, led by Deputy Foreign Minister Abdrakhmanov and dominated by trade, investment and energy officials, visited Afghanistan September 24-28, to, among other things, examine the possibility of leading or participating in a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). The visit included meetings with several Afghan ministers, briefings and consultations at ISAF and CFC-A HQs, and a visit to the Norwegian-led PRT in the northern province of Faryab. Based on comments made by Kazakhs during the visit, we believe their primary objective is to establish a low cost toehold in Afghanistan. We will be pleasantly surprised if the Kazakhs agree to establish and lead a new PRT, but think it is more likely that they will offer to augment an existing PRT, perhaps with construction engineers and/or agricultural specialists. END SUMMARY.

ISAF: Strong steer to Sari Pul

¶2. (SBU) At ISAF HQ, the delegation received a detailed briefing on the structure and functions of PRTs, as well as an intelligence assessment on the security situation in the north of Afghanistan, where Kazakhstan indicated an interest in establishing a PRT or participating in an existing one. The ISAF briefer noted that the north of Afghanistan enjoyed a relatively permissive security environment. In most parts, the threat was assessed as "low," and in no area was it greater than "medium." ISAF Chief Engineer Brigadier General Dickie Davis (UK), who is

responsible for ISAF PRT policy, warmly welcomed Kazakhstan's interest in PRTs and strongly recommended that it consider setting up a PRT in the quiet, but relatively neglected and underdeveloped northern province of Sari Pul, one of four provinces currently covered by the over-extended Swedish-led PRT in Mazar-e-Sharif. Davis' staff subsequently provided the delegation with a 12-page unclassified assessment of Sari Pul.

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¶3. (SBU) Davis argued against the Kazakhs establishing a PRT in Jawzjan province (another northern province currently covered by PRT Mazar-e-Sharif), noting that it was important that Jawzjan and Balkh provinces -- dominated by opposing warlords -- be covered by a single PRT. Otherwise, ISAF would lose the ability to successfully stem inter-factional fighting. Davis emphasized that it made "no military sense" to split Jawzjan from Balkh. However, in the question and answer period, it was clear that the Kazakh delegation -- dominated by trade, investment and energy officials -- found Jawzjan a more attractive possibility for a PRT, given the border province's stronger economic base, including proven oil reserves.

CFC-A: Not something to be entered into lightly

¶4. (SBU) At CFC-A, Deputy Commander Major General Wilson (UK) stressed that leading a PRT was a significant (and expensive) undertaking. He estimated that it cost \$5-10 million to set up a PRT and another \$2-5 million per year to keep it running. In order to be effective, a PRT also had to be able to provide a significant amount of money to spend on reconstruction and development assistance to the

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local area. He noted that several countries had come to CFC-A in the past to express an interest in leading a PRT, only to find out that it was a bigger challenge than they had realized. Wilson also stressed the importance of a PRT including a significant number of police officers to help mentor and train the police in its province.

PRT Maimana: An offer of construction engineers

¶5. (SBU) At the Norwegian-led Maimana PRT in the northern province of Faryab, the delegation had the opportunity to see first-hand what a well-run, medium-size PRT (about 200 total members) based in a relatively secure area looks like and how it operates. (Note: The Finnish Government has invested 2.1 million dollars in the past two years on developing the provincial justice sector, including the construction of eleven police stations and training for local officials. The GOF is in the process of building a women's prison. More details will be provided septel. End Note). Questions from the Kazakhs focused on practical issues, like the annual running costs of the PRT (estimated at \$10-15 million, including all salaries) and the source of PRT's logistic support. In response to the PRT commander's remark that improving secondary roads in the province required more attention, Deputy Foreign Minister Abdrakhmanov wondered what the per-kilometer cost of roads was in the province and asked whether the PRT could accommodate a group of Kazakh engineers and their road-building equipment. The PRT commander replied that while there was no extra room on the current PRT compound, the Kazakh engineers and equipment would be "very welcome" in the new, larger PRT compound, currently under construction next to the Maimana air strip and scheduled for completion next spring. Upon boarding the plane to return to Kabul, members of the delegation were overheard commenting to each other, that since they had to find "something" to contribute to the ISAF/Coalition mission, perhaps it might be providing just a couple of individuals to a PRT, "like

the Finns have done" in Maimana.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Kazakhstan will almost certainly make some kind of offer in support of the ISAF/Coalition mission here in Afghanistan. That decision, driven by political imperative, appears to have already been made; the only question is how extensive the offer will be. We will be pleasantly surprised if the Kazakhs agree to establish and lead a new PRT, but think it is more likely that they will offer to augment an existing PRT, perhaps with construction engineers and/or agricultural specialists. The Kazakhs are clearly examining the options here through economic lenses and weighing the costs of establishing a PRT against the potential benefits it might yield in business deals. Were the oil-rich and well-connected border province of Jawzjan on offer for a PRT, Kazakhstan might be more tempted to take the plunge, given the potential spin-off opportunities it could create for Kazakh business interests. They seemed to find Sari Pul -- a economic back-water that has no developed provincial center and lies far off the ring road ? a far less attractive alternative.

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NORLAND